

Y2K UPDATE

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New millennium offers window of opportunity to preach preparedness

by Michael Cline
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What would you do if you had foreknowledge of an impending crisis or disaster?

Would you educate the citizens of your community or wait and hope the problem will go away?

Hollywood has given us time travel, crystal balls, and even an "early edition" of the newspaper to gaze into the future. In the real world of emergency management, it doesn't quite work that way.

Though we have numerous resources at our disposal, we have all wished for a little more time to plan and prepare to save lives and property.

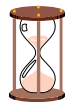
When we must often measure response time in hours or minutes, the century date change or Y2K offers an amazing window of opportunity.

Unlike most emergency or disaster events, we know when it will happen. We also know what to do about it ... or do we?

In Virginia, the answer is yes. Our multi-level approach to this issue doesn't attempt to reinvent the wheel,



but instead capitalizes on the strengths of existing plans and programs and supplements those functions most critical to a Y2K response.



Provide the Necessary Tools

In the event of a Y2K-related emergency, we will implement the existing state emergency operations plan (with modifications) as we would with any other emergency or disaster situation. Those modifications were published as a Y2K supplement to the state emergency operations plan at the end of June and will soon be distributed to state emergency operations coordinators.

Last month, we also sent a Y2K "toolkit" to emergency managers statewide. This kit has good checklists and a lot of valuable information and guidance. As operational pieces fall into place, we will provide supplements for these kits.

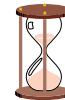


Preserve Continuity of Day-to-Day Functions

Virginia's Century Date Change Initiative Office or CDCI has been coordinating with state agencies to

ensure the compliance of our internal capabilities and systems (down to embedded chips).

They've also done a great deal of outreach with local elected officials and those businesses or agencies who deal directly with us to ensure they are as compliant as possible.



Perform Emergency Response and Recovery

From a VDES perspective, we not only want to ensure we can fulfill the specific tasks we perform in the state emergency plan, but also that state agencies and local governments are prepared to carry out emergency preparedness, response and recovery operations.

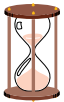
We know continuity of communications is essential and are talking with other state agencies, the CDCI, and government offices to reach a consensus on how best to deal with leave restrictions and backup notifications for key employees if phones are out.

In addition, we are coordinating with the Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Service or RACES for backup radio communications between the EOC and key state agencies and local governments in case these land lines fail.

Ideally, we will have the RACES system in place at each local government EOC and a number of state agencies by the end of the year.

This would be an additional backup mechanism in support of systems already in place (i.e., Virginia Criminal Information Network, special circuit radio networks and satellite communications at the federal level and with other states).

Our planning for the warning piece of preparedness is ongoing. In addition to our existing generator at the EOC, we are installing a generator at the Trade Court headquarters building, which should be operational in September.



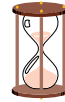
Anticipate Additional Potential Y2K Impacts

We are reaching out to other state agencies and the private sector as well to ensure continued ability to disseminate information regarding essential infrastructure such as public safety, transportation, health, and communications. If necessary, we are ready to activate the State Disaster Recovery Task Force.

CDCI is taking the lead to identify key players and make arrangements to activate or access them if Governor Gilmore decides they are needed. We are also considering establishing regional capabilities for communications interface (telephones and radio) in case locals are not able to contact our state EOC and could reach a regional office instead.

We plan to begin receiving SITREPS from locals on Dec. 1. At a minimum, we will fully augment the state EOC for 24-hour operation between Dec. 27 and Jan. 3, 2000. We are also prepared to augment the EOC on key dates (i.e., the end of the state and federal fiscal years, Sep. 9, and Aug. 22).

We have pre-identified a disaster field office in the Richmond area and will be ready to implement other response measures such as activating the joint information center to disseminate information to the media and guidance to the public and establishing an 800 number for citizen information and rumor control.



Prepare for Contingencies at the Local Level

Now that I've told you what we're doing, it's time to talk about what you can do to combat the "millennium bug." First, you need to plan, evaluate and train for Y2K contingencies. Look at the checklist in your Y2K toolkit. If you haven't done so already, pull together your department chiefs with the chief executive officer to look at areas of vulnerability.

It is important to remember that federal assistance to states and in turn to localities (except for critical lifesaving missions) will **NOT** be available for 24-48 hours after significant impacts. Likewise, state assistance (except for critical lifesaving missions) will **NOT** be available until after the first six to 24 hours. This lag time will allow FEMA and states to compile assessments of needs to better allocate resources.

Localities should not depend on the state as a resource for emergency equipment such as generators. There is no state stockpile of generators. We have identified our needs and are purchasing what will be required for state uses. You will also need to go through the "what ifs" and requirements for both emergency operations and continuity of business in your community.

As emergency managers, we preach preparedness. Now it's time to put those words into action.

Why not host a Y2K town meeting?

The President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion wants America's counties and cities to host town hall-style meetings with local leaders, companies and utilities.

Dubbed "Community Conversations," these programs will enable local citizens to voice their concerns about Y2K and work with service providers to identify areas where additional community preparation and planning are needed.

The council is working with more than 20 national associations represented on its Senior Advisors Group to encourage local

public officials and service providers to lead or participate in these conversations in their communities.

The council is offering a free "toolkit" to help organize the sessions, which includes a poster, informational video and a list of frequently asked questions that outlines who should participate.

A session has already been scheduled in Hampton Roads. Copies of the toolkit can be ordered through the Council's free information line 1-888-USA-4-Y2K.

A text version of the guidebook is available on the Council's Web site at www.y2k.gov.

